Dushera rituals for Shrinathji

The Dushera rituals practised by the followers of Pushti Marg, the path of Grace, are extremely symbolic. We can surely come closer to God, any God, even if we reflect on such aspects for a while.

Ankuraropan

These Dushera rituals are usually practised in Shrinathji and by most Vaishnavs who perform the seva of their Nidhi Swaroops in their homes. Shrinathji and all the Nidhi Swaroops are forms of Krishna, so I am addressing the lord as Krishna in this article.

The preparations for Dushera begin from the first day of Navratri itself. The idols are adorned using different coloured clothes (Vastra) and Shringar. Krishna is nirguna, beyond any guna. So Krishna's idol is adorned with white clothes on Dushera. A specific kind of sweet and savoury is offered to Krishna on each day of Navratri. A few grains of wheat are sown in 10 small earthen pots.

The first ritual of Dushera: Offering Jhawara

The wheat grains grow into tiny saplings within 9 days. These tiny saplings are known as 'Jhawara'. One tender perfectly grown Jhawara is harvested from each of the 10 pots on the day of Dushera. These Jhawara stalks are then bundled up together using a silk string.

This tiny bundle of Jhawara is then gently placed on Krishna's Mukut, during the Bhog darshan in the evening. Cymbals and bells constantly ring in the background while this ritual is being performed.

The Shami

The Jhawara shoots are removed from Krishna's Mukut on an auspicious day and offered to a Shami tree. The Shami is a sacred tree which cleanses our sins and gives us the strength to overcome our negative tendencies. According to the Mahabharata, the Pandavas hid all their arms amidst the branches of a Shami tree in the last year of their exile. They

sought the blessings of the Shami tree before waging the war and asked for the strength to fight against their own relatives so that Dharma prevailed.

The Significance of this Dushera ritual

The concept underlying this ritual is beautiful indeed. As human beings, we all have Rajasic, Tamasic and Sattvic Gunas within us. But the ratio of these Gunas differs from person to person. It keeps changing within us too as we age.

These Gunas create various thoughts/emotions within us. We react or respond to external situations based on our Gunas. And though we all find it difficult to accept this fact, we all do have a fair share of good and bad Gunas too within us.

When we sow the grains of wheat on the first day of Navratri, it means we are willing to give all our good and bad Gunas free reign. Like the Jhawara shoots we just need to allow our thoughts and emotions to grow freely in the fertile soil of our hearts and minds.

And for the next 9 days, we just need to consciously focus on cleansing our hearts and minds and getting rid of our negative thoughts/emotions with our Bhakti for Krishna. On Dushera, we select one perfect tender Jhawara shoot from each pot, a symbolic representation of our purified Gunas/thoughts/emotions and surrender them all to Krishna who then wears them on his Mukut.

The essence of this Dushera ritual

We need to experience the entire gamut of emotions if we want to master the art of controlling them. We can experience the divine essence of Krishna when we make the effort to consciously purge our negative Gunas/thoughts and emotions from our minds and hearts regularly. The Shami tree empowers us to do all this.

The Second Ritual Of Dushera: The 10 Heads Of Ravana

A rangoli with a specific pattern having 10 blocks is drawn on a wooden platform. 10 balls of cow dung are placed in each of these 10 blocks and the entire wooden platform is placed in front of Krishna's feet.

The cow dung balls are worshipped with Kumkum, Akshat and Jhawara. A bindi of Sindoor is applied on each of these dung balls. After the darshan closes, these dung balls are shaped into flat cakes and dried in the sun. These cow dung cakes are used to heat the water for the lord's bath on Kali Chaudas/Naraka Chaturdashi, a day before Diwali.

The significance of this Dushera ritual

The 10 cow dung balls on the wooden platform represent the 10 heads of Ravana. Ravana, the master of the 4 Vedas and the 6 Shastras had a fertile mind but an equally fertile imagination. He imagined that he was greater than the lord himself and that proved to be his undoing.

The wooden platform with the 10 dung balls is placed on the floor at Krishna's feet to signify that we need to temper our knowledge, power, wealth, beauty, thoughts and emotions with humility.

The bindi of Sindoor that we apply over the cow dung balls represents the female energy of the Devi. Purusha, the male, the mind should always be balanced with Prakriti, the female, the heart. Else we will get carried away by our false sense of ego, ahamkara and end up behaving like Ravana.

The dung balls are left to dry under the sun. Like Ravana, we often get carried away by our egos and ignore our heart which keeps warning us. When we allow our egos (dung balls) to dry out under the sun, it means we are surrendering to Prakriti (the sun). We are invoking Prakriti to balance our Purusha. We are willing to shed our false sense of pride, our ahamkara and listen to our heart.

And Krishna happily bathes in the water that is heated using these dried dung cakes – because now we have learnt to balance our mind with our heart – and are worthy of being in close contact with Him.

The essence of this Dushera ritual

Our ego may help us gain power over the entire external world but it is humility and the balance between our mind and heart that brings us closer to Krishna.

The gopis of Vrindavan

The gopis of Vrindavan offer special prayers to the Devi, female divine energy, during Navratri. They love Krishna, the male form, the mind, with all their hearts. But they love the female energy that is dormant within them too with all their hearts. Krishna resides within the gopis. And the gopis always create a safe place for themselves in Krishna's heart with their unconditional love.

The Raas Leela that takes place between the gopis of Vrindavan and Krishna is a beautiful blend of male and female energies. It depicts the balance between the mind and the heart – where there is absolute surrender to Krishna – where nothing else matters or ever will. That is how sweet this union of male and female energies always is. And that is the kind of union, the kind of balance; we need to create in our lives every day if we want to experience Krishna's grace…